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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed the religion news reporters at daily newspapers in all circulation classes to assess the current state of the religion beat. Mail surveys were completed by 141 newspapers. Information concerning the following areas was solicited: (1) demographic characteristics (respondent's age, sex, religious preference), (2) staffing arrangements (respondent's title, supervisor's title, amount of time devoted to religion news coverage), (3) allocation of space, and (4) news-gathering practices (use of personal contacts, wire services, specialized religion news services). Findings indicated that approximately two-thirds of religion reporters at smaller newspapers and slightly over half of the journalists at papers with circulations over 50,000 were women. Religious preferences closely paralleled those of the population as a whole. Approximately half of the respondents reported being college graduates. Only 25% said they work full time on religion news, and 82% work alone. Among all respondents, approximately two-thirds used personal contacts frequently to find stories. Most respondents indicated that they had authority to decide which stories they would cover personally. A composite of the typical religion reporter, according to this survey, was a protestant, college-educated female, religiously active, with about ten years' experience in journalism and about four years' experience covering religion news. (Tables of data are included.) (AEW)

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Covering Religion News at Daily Newspapers

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Covering Religion News at Daily Newspapers

Officially a nation without a religion, the United States is, nevertheless, a religious nation. As Alexis de Tocqueville so astutely observed over a century ago, the decision by the founding fathers to grant religious freedom to all gave religions greater influence in American life than would have occurred had one church been established as the official state church according to the European practice.[1]

In a society such as the United States where no religion has an automatic claim to members and money, all become voluntary associations -- interest groups -- competing in the public arena for publicity and power.[2] In their attempts to attract attention, gain adherents and influence policy, they consciously or unconsciously seek publicity through the mass media. As the words and actions of candidates for political office in recent election campaigns vividly illustrate, religion is still the powerful force in America that de Tocqueville noted. The policy proposals and counter-proposals advanced by religious leaders, their candidates and their supporters are newsworthy because, if they were to become public policy, they would affect everyone, not just church members.

For news of those proposals and their possible effects, people turn to the mass media. But the religion news people read in their daily newspapers may be of uncertain quality. At newspapers, religion has traditionally been considered a second-class beat to be shunned by talented reporters.[3] As a result, journalism educators and communications researchers have generally ignored religion news.[4]

One recent studies found that editors and reporters ranked religion news 18th in importance out of 18 content areas.[5] While some studies do show low reader interest in religion news,[6] other

studies consistently indicate that at least three-fifths of a newspaper's readers read religion news.[7] Studies also indicate that at least one-fourth of newspaper reporters and editors perceive high reader interest in religion news.[8] Indeed, in some areas a higher proportion of readers may consider religion news important than attach similar importance to news from such traditionally more prestigious beats as business, science and sports.[9]

Although recent evidence, largely anecdotal, suggests the religion beat is losing its second-class status as editors and reporters become increasingly aware of the religious dimension of political news and of reader interest in the subject,[10] little is known about the religion beat at daily newspapers. In the only comprehensive study of religion journalists to date, Ranly found that among the religion journalists at daily newspapers with circulation over 100,000, relatively high proportions were women (36.8%) and active in their church (64.9%). He also found that, in general, religion journalists at the largest newspapers were experienced (about two-thirds had been journalists at least 10 years) and well-educated (four-fifths were college graduates; one-fourth had advanced degrees; and about half had at least some formal course work in religion or theology).[11]

However, Ranly conducted his survey of religion journalists in 1978 just as events began to focus attention on the importance of religion news. In addition, he limited his investigation to religion journalists at the largest metropolitan daily newspapers. While those newspapers are undoubtedly important because of their size and their influence, they comprise only about 15 percent of all daily newspapers in the country.

Therefore, this study surveyed the persons responsible for religion news at a random sample of daily newspapers in all circulation classes to assess the current state of the religion beat. In particular, this survey solicited information from which to compile a profile of the demographic characteristics and working arrangements of religion journalists.

Methodology

Data for this study comes from a mail survey of a stratified random sample of 250 daily newspapers listed in the 1985 edition of Editor and Publisher. The sample design included equal numbers of very small (weekday circulation under 10,000), small (weekday circulation between 10,000 and 30,000), medium (weekday circulation between 30,000 and 50,000), large (weekday circulation between 50,000 and 100,000) and very large (weekday circulation over 100,000) newspapers.

For this study, a daily newspaper is one that published Monday through Friday and at least once during the weekend.

The eight-page questionnaire with self-addressed, stamped return envelope was mailed on May 15, 1985, with two followup reminders sent during June. The last followup contained a duplicate questionnaire and stamped, return envelope.

Whenever possible, the questionnaire was addressed to the person listed as religion reporter or editor in Editor and Publisher. If no religion journalist was listed, the questionnaire was sent to the "religion reporter" along with a request that the questionnaire be completed by the person usually responsible for religion news at the newspaper.

Completed questionnaires were received from 141 newspapers for an overall response rate of 56 percent. The highest response rate came from the large newspapers (34 of 50, or 68%) while the lowest response rate (24 of 50, or 48%) came from the very small newspapers. Although the response rates associated with mail surveys always make interpreting the findings somewhat problematic, there seems little reason to believe the respondents are not generally representative. Response rates were similar for all geographic regions. Furthermore, both the "response" and "no response" groups included some newspapers known to the author to be committed to religion news coverage and others known to be relatively uninterested in religion news.

Some questions included in this study were designed to elicit information similar to that obtained by Ranly in his 1978 survey of religion journalists;[12] others were drawn from a more limited survey of religion journalists conducted by the author in 1981.[13] Questions used in this study solicited information in four areas:

Demographic Characteristics. These questions included fixed-response items to determine the respondents' age, sex, religious preference, education, years of experience as a journalist, and years of experience on the religion beat.

Those respondents who listed a religious preference were asked to name the specific religion with which they identify, tell whether they are a lay member or member of the clergy, and categorize themselves as "very active," "somewhat active," "not very active," or "not at all active" in their religion.

In addition to the general question about level of education, respondents were also asked whether at the college level they studied

journalism, theology (defined as courses intended primarily as clergy training), religion, or a combination of journalism and theology or religion. Those who did not study either journalism or religion/theology in college were asked to name their college major.

Staffing Arrangements. Questions in this category asked respondents to give their title and the title of their immediate supervisor, tell whether they spend "all," "most," or "less than half" of their time covering religion news, and tell how much if any, full-time or part-time help they have on the religion beat.

Allocation of Space. In addition, respondents were asked whether their newspapers sets aside space for religion news. Those respondents who reported that their newspapers regularly set aside space for religion news were asked how much space is regularly set aside, on what day the religion news regularly appears, and whether "all," "more than half," "about half," or "less than half" of the stories they cover each week appear in the space set aside specifically for religion news.

Newsgathering Practices. In this category, respondents were asked whether in covering religion news they use (1) personal contacts, (2) newsletters and news releases from congregations, (3) newsletters and news releases from other religious organization, (4) wire services (AP, UPI, etc.), (5) other general news services and syndicates, (6) specialized religion news services (RNA, etc.), and (7) other media (books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television) "a lot," "some," "not much," or "not at all."

Respondents were also asked whether they have "a lot", "some," "not much" or "no" authority to (1) select stories they cover, (2)

assign other reporters to religion news stories, (3) collaborate with other reporters on stories involving religion and some other subject, (4) check or approve stories about religion reported by other journalists at the newspaper, and (5) select or check wire service stories that happen to be about religion.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Sex: Although Ranly found that about one-third of the religion reporters at the largest daily newspapers are women, this study indicates that religion reporting is primarily women's work. Of all respondents, 59 percent said they are female.

Approximately two-thirds of the religion reporters at the smaller papers are women, while slightly over half of the religion journalists at papers with circulation over 50,000 are women. The most even distribution by sex occurred at the medium-size newspapers where 52 percent of the religion journalists are women and 48 percent are men. Although these differences are not statistically significant with this size sample (Cramer's V = .14, n.s.), they may indicate that in the last decade religion reporting has offered an opportunity for women to move from smaller newspapers to larger ones.

Religion: The religious preferences expressed by respondents to this survey closely parallel those reported by Ranly and those of the population as a whole. Among all respondents, 59 percent are Protestant, 21 percent are Catholic, 6 percent identify with other religions within the Christian tradition, 2 percent are affiliated with the Jewish faith and 2 percent with religions outside

the Judeo-Christian tradition. Only 10 percent reported no religious affiliation.

Among those who described themselves as Protestant, the most frequently mentioned denominations are Methodist (14 mentions), Baptist (11 mentions), Episcopalian (8 mentions), and Lutheran (7 mentions). Those identifying themselves as belonging to another faith within the Christian tradition are approximately equally divided between the Unitarian Church and Latter Day Saints. Non-christians found in this sample include members of the Bahai and Buddhist faiths.

No statistically significant differences were found in the religious affiliations reported by religion journalists working at the various size newspapers (Cramer's V = .20, n.s.). Although all of the Jewish respondents work at the largest newspapers, those adhering to beliefs outside the Judeo-Christian tradition work at both small and large newspapers. Reporters with no religious affiliation work at newspapers in each of the circulation categories. (See Table 1)

Of the 118 respondents to this survey who identified with a religious faith, most said either that they are very active (35%) or somewhat active (39%). Although 10 percent identified themselves as members of the clergy, these clergy-journalists did not report being very active in their religion.

Although the differences are not statistically significant with this size sample, 55 percent of the respondents from large newspapers reported being very active in their religion and approximately one-third reported being somewhat active, while none reported being inactive. However, more than one-third of the

religion journalists at the smallest and the largest newspapers reported little or no personal involvement in religious activity (Kendall's Tau C = .07, n.s.). (See Table 2)

Age: Of all the respondents to this survey, 38 percent are between the ages of 26 and 35 and 35 percent are between the ages of 36 and 50. The remainder are rather evenly divided between the under-26 age group and the over-50 age group.

In general, the person responsible for religion news at a larger newspaper is likely to be somewhat older than the person responsible for religion news at a smaller newspaper (Kendall's Tau B = .13, p = .04). Slightly over half of the respondents working at newspapers with circulation over 50,000 are over 35; slightly over half of those from smaller newspapers are under 35. Although nearly half the very young reporters work for the smallest newspapers, young religion reporters are found at all but the very largest newspapers. (See Table 3)

Education: Only three respondents did not attend college, while slightly more than one-third reported at least some study at the graduate level. Approximately half are college graduates.

However, in general, the better-educated reporters are working at larger newspapers (Kendall's Tau C = .29, p = .00). All of the respondents who have only a high school education work for newspapers with circulation less than 30,000. Respondents with masters degrees work for newspapers in each of the five circulation categories. Three-fourths of the respondents who have continued their education beyond a masters degree work for newspapers with circulation over 100,000, and all of these highly-educated religion journalists work for newspapers with circulation over 30,000. (See Table 4)

Of the 129 respondents who attended college, 51 percent studied journalism; 19 percent studied both journalism and religion or theology; 10 percent studied religion or theology, but not journalism; and 20 percent studied neither journalism nor religion/theology. The most common majors mentioned by the latter group include English (15 mentions), history (4 mentions), natural sciences and philosophy (3 mentions each).

Respondents from larger newspapers are approximately three times more likely to report having studied religion or theology either in addition to journalism or instead of journalism than are respondents from smaller newspapers (Cramer's V = .24, p = .06). Well over half the religion journalists at newspapers in each of the circulation categories reported having studied journalism at the college level. However, fewer than one-fifth of the religion journalists at newspapers with circulation under 50,000 reported having studied religion or theology. In sharp contrast, more than one-third of the religion journalists at large newspapers and half of the religion journalists at very large newspapers studied religion or theology at the college level. (See Table 5) These findings suggest that newspapers have increased their hiring of people with degrees in journalism and with advanced degrees to cover religion news since 1978 when Ranly conducted his survey of religion journalists at very large newspapers. However, the proportion of religion journalists who have studied religion and/or theology has not changed much in the last eight years.

Experience: Although religion reporting seems to be primarily woman's work, it does not seem to be primarily an entry-level assignment. Only about one-fourth of the respondents to this survey

had been working professionally as journalists for fewer than five years; almost half had at least 10 years' experience.

However, the data also suggest there may be significant opportunity for beginners to cover religion news at smaller newspapers. Nearly half of all religion journalists at the smallest newspapers have five years or less professional experience. In contrast, only about one-fifth of the respondents working for newspapers with circulation over 30,000 have similarly limited experience. (See Table 6)

Although respondents from the larger papers generally have been journalists longer than those at smaller papers (Kendall's Tau C = .11, p = .06), there is little relationship between experience on the religion beat and size of newspaper (Kendall's Tau C = .04, n.s.). Approximately two-thirds of the respondents from the largest papers and from the smallest ones said they have covered religion news for fewer than five years. Similarly, approximately one-fifth of the respondents from both the largest and the smallest papers said they have covered religion news for more than 16 years. (See Table 6)

Working Arrangements

Staffing the Beat: Of all the respondents to this survey, 23 percent said they have the title of religion reporter or writer and 30 percent said their title is religion or church editor. However, the remaining 47 percent have titles that do not reflect responsibility for religion news. In fact, 4 percent have the title of copy or wire editor or even "clerk." Their only connection with religion news is collecting and assembling available stories about religion for the paper each week.

Respondents from larger papers are more likely to have the title of religion reporter/writer or religion editor, while respondents from smaller papers are more likely to have a title that does not reflect responsibility for religion news (Cramer's V = .33, p = .00). At newspapers with circulation over 50,000 approximately three-fourths of the journalists responsible for religion news have the title of religion writer or editor, but only about one-fourth of those at smaller papers have similar titles. (See Table 7)

Of all the respondents 45 percent said they report to the city or assistant city editor, 18 percent report to the managing editor or assistant managing editor, 13 percent report to a feature or lifestyle editor, and 9 percent said they have no direct superior.

Consistent with the simpler organization patterns of small newspapers, 50 percent of the respondents who work at newspapers with circulation under 10,000 said their superior is the editor-in-chief or publisher; 21 percent named a managing editor; and 25 percent said they have no immediate superior. In sharp contrast, more than half the journalists who work at newspapers with circulation over 30,000 named the city editor, an assistant city editor or an assistant managing editor as their immediate superior. Approximately one-fifth of those who work at newspapers with circulation between 30,000 and 100,000 report to a lifestyle or feature editor, but fewer than 10 percent of those who work at very small or very large newspapers do so. (Cramer's V = .49, p = 00).

Time Spent on Religion News: Only 25 percent of all respondents

said they work full time covering religion news; 60 percent reported spending less than half time on the religion beat.

Most (82%) also said they work alone. Only three respondents (2%) said they have a colleague who also covers religion news full time. Fewer than one-fourth of the respondents reported having regular part-time help covering religion news. Five respondents (4%) said there are four or more people at their paper who regularly spend part of their time covering religion news, but these part-time religion writers are primarily area correspondents who cover religion along with other kinds of news arising on their beats.

As might be expected from their titles, respondents from larger newspapers reported devoting significantly more time to religion reporting than did reporters from smaller newspapers (Kendall's Tau C = .50, p = 00). None of the respondents from newspapers with circulation under 30,000 devoted full time to religion news, but one-third of the respondents from large newspapers and two-thirds of those from the very large newspapers reported spending full time on religion news. More than four-fifths of the respondents from newspapers with circulation under 50,000 reported spending less than half time on religion news. (See Table 8)

Although all of the respondents who reported having a full-time colleague on the religion beat work for very large newspapers, approximately equal numbers of respondents from each of the circulation categories reported having some regular part-time help with religion news. However, all of the newspapers where help on the religion beat comes from area respondents have circulations under 50,000.

Allocation of Space

Amount of Space: Of the respondents to this survey, 92 percent said their newspaper sets aside space for religion news, usually on Friday (24%) or Saturday (60%). Another 8 percent said their newspaper sets aside space on two or more days, including either Friday or Saturday. Among the newspapers that do set aside space for religion news, approximately one-third allocate the equivalent of one broadsheet page to religion news while almost half allocate two or more pages.

At least two-thirds of the newspapers with circulation greater than 30,000 set aside space for religion news on Saturday while more than three-fourths of the smaller papers set aside space on Friday (58%) or sometime earlier in the week (21%), perhaps because many of these newspapers do not publish on both Saturday or Sunday and, therefore, have a somewhat limited week-end news hole. Although at least one newspaper in each circulation category sets aside space for religion news on two days each week, only respondents from small and large newspapers reported having regular space available on three or more days.

In general, the larger newspapers set aside more space for religion news than do the smaller ones (Kendall's Tau C = .15, p = .02). Whereas three-fourths of the smallest newspapers allocate one page or less to religion news, nearly half of the other papers allocate two pages or more. However, respondents from newspapers with circulation between 50,000 and 100,000 reported the greatest allocation of space. Nearly two-thirds of these large newspapers set aside at least two pages each week for religion news. (See Table 9)

Story Display: Approximately three-fourths of all respondents said that most or all of the news they cover appears in the space set aside for religion news, but 18 percent said less than half of their stories appear on the religion page.

In spite of the larger news hole available to religion journalists at the larger newspapers, these journalists reported having a smaller proportion of their stories confined to the religion page than did the respondents from the smaller newspapers (Kendall's Tau C = -.28, p = .00). Among the respondents from the smallest newspapers, 42 percent said all of their stories appear in space set aside for religion and only 21 percent said few of their stories appear in that space. However, the situation is reversed at the largest newspapers where 15 percent of the respondents said all their stories appear on the religion page and 46 percent said very few of their stories appear on the religion page. (See Table 10)

Newsgathering Practices

Sources of News: Among all respondents, approximately two-thirds said they use personal contacts a lot to find their stories and about half said they rely heavily on mailings and news releases from congregations. About one-third said they use mailings and news releases from other religious organizations a lot, while slightly fewer reported heavy reliance on the wire services. Fewer than 5 percent of the respondents said they use other general news services, specialized religion news services or other media a lot.

Respondents from the larger newspapers reported the heaviest use of personal contacts, perhaps because their full time assignment to the religion beat gives them more time for active newsgathering (Kendall's Tau C = .16, p = .01). Approximately three-fourths of

the respondents from newspapers with circulation over 50,000 reported using personal contacts a lot, but only about half of those from newspapers with circulation under 50,000 make similarly heavy use of personal contacts.

Respondents from the larger newspapers also reported somewhat heavier use than did those from smaller newspapers of mailings and news releases from other religious organizations (Kendall's Tau C = .09, p = .1), general news syndicate (Kendall's Tau C = .18, p = .01), specialized religion news services (Kendall's Tau C = .23, p = .00), and other media (Kendall's Tau C = .42, p = .00). However, with the exception of mailings from religious organizations, none of these alternate sources are used a lot by even one fifth of the respondents from the larger newspapers.

Although the relationships are weak and not particularly significant, respondents from smaller newspapers rely slightly more heavily on mailings and news releases from congregations (Kendall's Tau C = -.02, n.s.) and on the wire services (Kendall's Tau C = -.08, p = .1) because these are relatively efficient ways to fill space when one has little time for active news gathering. Although approximately equal numbers of respondents (80%) report using congregational mailings a lot, only respondents from newspapers with circulation over 50,000 reported never using this news source. Only abut one-fifth of the respondents from the larger newspapers reported using the wire services a lot, but the same was true for only about one-third of those from newspapers with circulation under 50,000. At newspapers with circulations between 10,000 and 50,000 at least 80 percent of the respondents reported using wire services "some" or " a lot." In contrast, only about two-thirds of the

respondents from the very small or the larger newspapers reported similarly heavy use. However, this apparently heavy use of the wires by these mid-size newspapers may be due in part to the fact that in this sample all of the copy or wire editors responsible for religion news work at newspapers with circulations between 10,000 and 50,000.

Authority: Among all respondents, more than three-fourths said they have a lot of authority to decide which stories to cover personally and almost half said they have a lot of authority to select or check stories from the wire services. However, only about one-fourth of the respondents have similar authority to assign other reporters to religion news stories, collaborate with them, or check their work when other journalists report stories involving religion.

At the larger newspapers where reporters are more likely to be recognized as specialists, reporters are more likely to have a lot of authority to select stories to cover personally (Kendall's Tau C = .10, p = .03) and to collaborate on stories with other professionals (Kendall's Tau C = .10, p = .1). More than four-fifths of the respondents from newspapers with circulation over 50,000 say they have a lot of authority to select stories to cover, but fewer than three-fourths of the reporters from smaller papers have similar authority. However, only respondents from newspapers with circulation between 30,000 and 100,000 reported having no authority to select stories to cover.

When it comes to collaboration with others, 36 percent of the respondents from the largest newspapers and 41 percent from the smallest reported having a lot of authority to work with other

reporters. Fewer than one-fifth of the respondents from other papers reported similar authority to collaborate. While at least one-fifth of the respondents from newspapers with circulation under 100,000 said they have no authority to collaborate, all respondents from the very largest newspapers said they have at least some ability to work cooperatively on stories.

Respondents from the smaller newspapers generally report slightly more authority to assign other reporters to religion stories (Kendall's Tau C = -.24, p = .00) and to select stories from the wire (Kendall's Tau C = -.15, p = .02) than do respondents from larger newspapers. At least one-fourth of the respondents from newspapers with circulation under 50,000 have authority to assign other reporters to stories and at least half have authority to select from the wire. In contrast, fewer than 10 percent of the respondents from the larger newspapers can assign other reporters to stories and only about one-third can select from or check wire stories.

Although the relationship between size of newspaper and authority to check stories about religion written by other reporters is weak and not significant with this size sample (Kendall's Tau C = -.05, n.s.), respondents from smaller newspapers reported somewhat more authority to check stories written by their colleagues than respondents from the larger newspapers where levels of reporting ability are generally presumed to be higher. Approximately three-fifths of the respondents from newspapers with circulation under 30,000 and half of those from newspapers with circulation over 100,000 reported some or a lot of ability to check the work of their colleagues. Only about one-third of those from newspapers

with circulation between 30,000 and 100,000 reported similar levels of authority over their colleagues' work. However, only abut 10 percent of the respondents from the largest newspapers said they can never check other reporters' stories, but about one-third of those from newspapers smaller than 100,000 said they have no authority to check stories.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the typical religion journalist at a daily newspaper is a female, Protestant, active in her religion, with a college degree in journalism and about 10 years professional journalism experience but only about four years of experience covering religion news.

She probably reports to a city editor who expects her to fill about two pages each week while spending less than half her time reporting the religion news for those pages. Therefore, she relies heavily on mailings and news releases from congregations and on the wire services for stories, using personal contacts only when she has time.

While this portrait of the typical religion journalist suggests the beat has lost little of its second class status, this portrait is nothing more than a statistical average. A closer look at the data suggests that at many large newspapers (and some smaller ones) religion news coverage is probably good and improving, while at many smaller newspapers (and some large ones) religion news is still little more than an afterthought.

While this study found little change since Ranly's 1978 survey in the religious preferences of religion journalists or in the proportion who had studied religion or theology, 1985 data indicate

that religion journalism is now overwhelmingly women's work. Whereas in 1978 Ranly found that slightly over one-third of the religion journalists at the largest newspapers were women, this study found that now more than two-thirds of all religion journalists and slightly over half of those at the largest papers are women.

However, this change does not seem to indicate a decrease in the status or the professionalism associated with the beat. At the largest newspapers, the proportion of religion journalists with a degree in journalism and with some graduate study also increased between 1978 and 1985.

Furthermore, at the larger newspapers, the person responsible for religion news probably has the title of religion writer or editor, reports to a city editor, devotes full-time to covering the religion beat and may even have a full-time or regular part-time colleague on the beat. Therefore, the religion journalist can engage in active newsgathering, use a variety of sources and still fill at least two pages each week while also producing a significant number of stories that compete successfully for space in the general newshole.

However, the status of religion journalism at most smaller newspapers is more problematic. Not only may the person responsible for religion news have a title reflecting no responsibility for religion news, but she (and 70 percent of the religion journalists at smaller papers are women) may report to a feature/lifestyle editor or to another superior (publisher, editor-in-chief, managing editor) who is as likely to think of religion news as fluff as to think of it as real news.

Furthermore, the religion journalist at smaller papers can probably devote only about half time to the beat, but still must fill at least one, and probably two, pages of news during the week. As a result, most newsgathering at these papers appears to be passive in nature with heavy reliance on congregational mailings and whatever becomes available from the wire services.

One cannot make definitive statements about the quality of news coverage based on survey data about the characteristics of journalists and about their working arrangements and newsgathering practices. However, the positive differences in response patterns by journalists at the largest newspapers found between Ranly's survey and this one coupled with the differences found in this survey between response patterns of journalists working at the larger and at the smaller newspapers suggest areas that need further investigation to determine if the qualifications of journalists, the staffing patterns at newspapers and the allocation of resources do, indeed, influence the kinds of religion news coverage readers receive.

It would certainly be unreasonable to expect smaller newspapers to be able to allocate the same amount of resources -- staff time, space, money for additional news services -- to religion news that is possible at larger newspapers. However, some of the differences in the religion beat between smaller and larger newspapers are worth considering for their image value even if the differences can ultimately be shown to make little difference in actual news coverage. Smaller newspapers, without allocating additional resources, could easily give their journalists titles that reflect the full range of their responsibilities or switch the beat from

the lifestyle/feature section to the city desk in an effort to encourage serious news coverage.

Similarly, it makes little sense to advocate larger newspapers devote even more resources to what is, after all, only one of many beats. Still, without allocating additional resources, larger newspapers might consider giving their religion journalists authority at least equal to that enjoyed by journalists at smaller newspapers to check wire service stories and to assign other reporters to an occasional religion story in an effort to increase the accuracy and breadth of religion reporting at their newspapers.

Notes

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, translated by Phillipe Bradley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

2. See: David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, Jr., "Moonies" in America: Cult, Church and Crusade (Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage, 1979); Murray S. Stedman, Jr., Religion and Politics in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964); James R. Wood, Leadership in Voluntary Organizations (New Brunswick, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

3. Terry Mattingly, "Religion News: No Room at the Inn?" The Quill, 71(1)12-19. January 1983.

4. This information is based on an examination of reporting textbooks, communications journals and conversations with members of the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. The most complete discussions of religion news are found in the later editions of Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretative Reporting (New York: Macmillan, 1972ff) and Ralph Izard, Reporting the Citizens' News (New York: CBS College Publishing, 1982).

5. Charles K. Atkin, Judee K. Burgoon and Michael Burgoon, "How Journalists Perceive the Reading Audience," Newspaper Research Journal, 4(2):51-63. Winter 1983.

6. Judee K. Burgoon, Michael Burgoon and Miriam Wilkinson, "Dimensions of Content Readership in 10 Newspaper Markets," Journalism Quarterly, 60 (1):74-80. Spring 1981; Michael Burgoon, Judee K. Burgoon and Miriam Wilkinson, "Dimensions and Readership of Newspaper Content," Newspaper Research Journal, 3(1):74-93. October 1981.

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8. Atkin, Burgoon and Burgoon, loc. cit.

9. Shaw and Riffe, loc. cit.; Lynn and Bennett, loc. cit.

10. Mattingly, loc. cit.; "The Religion Beat: The Reporting of Religion in America," report of a Rockefeller Foundation Conference, August 1981.

11. Don Ranly, "How Religion Editors of Newspapers View Their

Jobs and Religion," Journalism Quarterly, 56(4):844-849. Winter 1979.

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Table 1

Religious Preferences of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

	Religion					
Circulation	Catholic[a]	Protestant	Other Christian[b]	Jewish	Other Non-Christian[c]	None
Very Small 10,000 (n=23)	17.4%	69.7%	4.3%	-----	4.3%	4.3%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=22)	27.3%	54.5%	9.1%	-----	----	9.1%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=24)	20.8%	66.7%	----	-----	----	12.5%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=33)	24.2%	54.6%	6.1%	-----	3.0%	12.1%
Very Large 100,000 (n=29)	13.8%	51.8%	13.8%	10.3%	----	10.3%

Cramer's V = .20, n.s.

[a]Includes Roman and Orthodox Catholic.

[b]Includes Unitarian and Latter Day Saints.

[c]Includes Buddhist and Bahai.

Table 2

Religious Activity of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspaper

Circulation	Level of Activity: Very Active	Somewhat Active	Not Very Active	Not at All Active
Very Small 10,000 (n=21)	33.3%	23.8%	23.8%	19.1%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=20)	20.0%	55.0%	15.0%	10.0%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=21)	33.3%	47.7%	19.0%	----
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=29)	55.2%	31.0%	13.8%	----
Very Large 100,000 (n=26)	26.9%	38.5%	19.2%	15.4%

Kendall's Tau C = .07, n.s.

Table 3

Age of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

	Age				
Circulation	25	26-35	36-50	51-65	65
Very Small 10,000 (n=23)	17.4%	43.5%	30.4%	----	8.7%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=23)	8.7%	39.1%	30.4%	17.4%	4.3%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=24)	4.2%	25.0%	58.3%	12.5%	----
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=33)	6.1%	45.5%	18.2%	24.2%	6.1%
Very Large 100,000 (n-30)	----	36.7%	43.3%	16.7%	3.3%

Kendall's Tau B = -.13, p = .04

Table 4

Education of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

	Level					
Circulation	H.S. Grad.	Some College	College Grad.	Some Grad. Study	Masters Degree	Some Add. Study
Very Small 10,000 (n=22)	4.5%	22.7%	54.5%	9.1%	9.1%	----
Small 10,000-30.000 (n=23)	8.7%	8.7%	65.2%	13.0%	4.3%	----
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=24)	-----	16.7%	54.2%	12.5%	12.5%	4.2%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=33)	-----	18.2%	36.4%	24.2%	18.2%	3.0%
Very Large 100,000 (n=30)	-----	3.3%	33.3%	26.7%	16.7%	20.0%

Kendall's Tau $\hat{c}$ = .29, p = .00

Table 5

Specialized Education of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

			Areas of Study			
Circulation	Journalism	Theology[a]	Religion	Jour. & Theol.	Jour. & Relig.	Other Major(s)
Very Small 10,000 (n=21)	42.9%	----	4.8%	4.8%	9.5%	38.1%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=22)	72.7%	----	4.5%	----	9.1%	13.6%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=24)	62.5%	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	----	25.0%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=31)	45.2%	6.5%	3.2%	6.5%	22.6%	16.1%
Very Large 100,000 (n=30)	36.7%	----	20.0%	10.0%	20.0%	13.3%

Cramer's V = .24, p = .06

Table 6

Professional Experience of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

Circulation	Years Experience 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16
Total Experience in Journalism[a]				
Very Small 10,000 (n=24)	41.7%	25.0%	4.2%	29.2%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=27)	25.9%	29.6%	25.9%	18.5%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=25)	20.0%	40.0%	16.0%	24.0%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=34)	20.6%	32.4%	23.5%	23.5%
Very Large 100,000 (n=31)	22.6%	22.6%	22.6%	32.3%
Experience in Religion Journalism[b]				
Very Small 10,000 (n=24)	66.7%	8.3%	4.2%	20.8%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=27)	70.4%	18.5%	7.4%	3.7%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=25)	72.0%	20.0%	----	8.0%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=34)	64.7%	20.6%	14.7%	----
Very Large 100,000 (n=31)	61.3%	12.9%	6.5%	19.4%

[a]Kendall's Tau C = .11, p = .06
[b]Kendall's Tau C = .04 n.s.

Table 7

Titles of Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

	Title				
Circulation	Religion Editor[a]	Religion Reporter[a]	Other Editor	Other Reporter	Other[b]
Very Small 10,000 (n=22)	13.6%	9.1%	63.6%	13.6%	----
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=27)	29.6%	----	33.3%	29.6%	7.4%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=25)	32.0%	16.0%	16.0%	28.0%	8.0%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=34)	29.4%	38.2%	5.9%	20.6%	5.9%
Very Large 100,000 (n=31)	38.7%	41.9%	3.2%	16.1%	----

Cramer's V = .33, p = .00

[a]These categories include journalists whose titles combine mention of religion with mention of some other area, e.g. religion and lifestyle editor, religion and entertainment writer.

[b]This category includes copy editors, wire editors, clerks, librarians, etc.

Table 8

Time Spent on Religion News by Religion Journalists at Daily Newspapers

	Amount of Time		
Circulation	Less than Half Time	Most of Time	Full-time
Very Small 10,000 (n=24)	95.8%	4.2%	----
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=27)	96.3%	3.7%	----
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=24)	83.3%	4.2%	12.5%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=34)	50.0%	14.7%	35.3%
Very Large 100,000 (n=31)	22.6%	12.9%	64.5%

Kendall's Tau C = .50, p = .00

Table 9

Space Allocated to Religion News at Daily Newspapers

	Amount of Space[a]			
Circulation	One Page	One Page	Two Pages	Two Pages
Very Small 10,000 (n=19)	31.6%	42.1%	15.8%	10.5%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=26)	19.2%	34.6%	30.8%	15.4%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=25)	16.0%	40.0%	28.0%	16.0%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=34)	14.7%	20.6%	38.2%	26.5%
Very Large 100,000 (n=29)	17.2%	38.0%	34.5%	10.3%

Kendall's Tau C = .15, p = .02

[a]Space refers to broadsheet pages. Two tabloid pages were assumed to be equal in space to one broadsheet page.

Table 10

Proportion of Stories by Religion Journalists
Appearing on Religion Pages in Daily Newspapers

Circulation	Proportion of Stories: All	Half	About Half	Half
Very Small 10,000 (n=19)	42.1%	26.3%	10.5%	21.1%
Small 10,000-30,000 (n=24)	70.8%	25.0%	----	4.2%
Medium 30,000-50,000 (n=22)	45.5%	45.5%	----	9.1%
Large 50,000-100,000 (n=33)	39.4%	45.5%	9.1%	6.1%
Very Large 100,000 (n=28)	14.3%	25.0%	14.3%	46.4%

Kendall's Tau C = -.28, p = .00